



## **Useful to the Lord 10**

### **Leveraging the Detours**

**Pastor Mike Fabarez**

God said to the prophet Jeremiah, "Whatever I command you, you shall speak." It said of God in Psalm 135, "Whatever the Lord pleases, he does." Jesus said to his followers, "Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do." Solomon wrote in the Old Testament, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might." Jesus promised to one day say, "Whatever you have done to the least of these my brothers, you've done unto me." As you can hear, there are some really terrific contexts in which the word "whatever" is enlisted in our Bibles.

Sadly, that's not the way I normally use the word. I use the word "whatever" when I'm done. Usually in the middle of a conversation. What I mean by it, and I assume it's true for you, but there are times when you just say, "You're not getting it. And I no longer care." Right? So we say whatever, whatever. Matter of fact, modern English dictionaries will articulate this usage that we are used to hearing in our day, and they will say things like the word "whatever" as an expression of exasperation and indifference and usually it takes place in that order. I get exasperated and then I'm completely indifferent about what you're saying. In dictionaries that have phrases as synonyms, it will have phrases like this, "I don't care what you say," right? Equating that to the word "whatever" and "what will be will be." Just like the shrug of the shoulder. One linguistic tool says of our English usage of the word "whatever" that it is a conversational blocking tool, which I kind of like, I mean, that's it. Right? I build the fence. I'm done. I'm not talking to you anymore. And we're finished. Whatever.

I know you've all felt that if you regularly enlist the word that way or not. And I just want you to think this morning that that has to be the temptation. If not for Paul and Barnabas, it has to be the temptation we would have if we found ourselves in the situation that Paul and Barnabas find themselves in Acts Chapter 14. It's a situation that just gets so out of control, you can see where they would say, "Well, we're done with this town," and just kind of shrug their shoulders and say, "Whatever. You don't get it and I quit. I'm done. I don't care anymore." They've just traveled, if you were with us last time, from Iconium south about 20 miles to a city called Lystra and in Lystra they were going to encounter a massive misunderstanding, a breakdown of communication that is so crazy that you'd think you would say if you were them, there's no hope for these people.

I certainly know that there's exasperation in this text. And while we would be tempted to feel that way, I just want you to know that as ambassadors of Christ and we're now in part 10 of 12 in this series of Paul's first missionary journey. What they do actually do is a template of training for those of us who 20 centuries later we want to be ambassadors in our day. We'd like to be missionaries to Southern California. We would like to represent Christ in our generation, and I can show you there are certainly parallels that we're going to encounter, though this scene seems so dramatic and extreme. I hope that we'll learn that the message that Paul is sharing is the same message that we are sharing, and this message is so important it demands that the messengers never shrug their shoulders and say whatever. We just can't. We'll say it about a lot of things. We can't say it about this.



With the urgency and importance and eternal significance of the message that we are called to give to our neighbors and our coworkers and our extended family who do not understand Christ, we have to continue and persevere. There has to be a tenacity in our hearts about this. We see this played out beautifully in this passage. It may seem far removed with Greco-Roman gods and, you know, strange things happening with a temple down the street to Zeus. But I want you to read this passage and start to understand that the frustration really is something we can identify with. If you have spent any time at all trying to share the Christ that you worship and the God that you read about every day in the Bible to our lost generation, it's an exasperating exercise at times.

So if you haven't already, I need you to pull out your Bibles here this morning and turn to Acts Chapter 14. We're going to fly through verses 8 through 18. And you've seen, if you have a worksheet, either digitally there on your computer or your tablet, or if you have it printed, that it's a two-point sermon. I don't want you to get excited like it's going to be shorter than normal. (audience laughs) Because there are lots of sub-points. But I want you to know that that's all we're really going to do and I'm capable of doing, I mean, I could do more, I suppose. But as a pastor, my job here is to see what we can learn. Paul says, you know, "take note of the pattern you've seen in me and imitate it. Just follow me as I follow Christ." The things that we read about, even as Paul says of Old Testament passages in First Corinthians 10 these are examples for us and we should learn from them. And Paul encounters something that you will admit as we read it, I'll never encounter something like that, but you will encounter something like that. It's a paradigm, a pattern that you will encounter.

So this sermon, if you are a, you know, a stickler for expository preaching, you'll say, "Well, this doesn't seem very expository." Well, I'll do a little expositing, I suppose, as we read through the text and I'll get the structure of the message from this passage. But it's a bit of a pastoral equipping hour. So I just want to say that upfront so that you know that we're reading a text that needs some bridge-building for us. Because we want to leave today having heard from God's word and having applied it to our lives today in the 21st century.

So I guess we should start a couple of verses earlier where they've come down from Iconium and I gave you a map, not just for those of you in our biblical geography class this weekend. This isn't just for Dr. McKinney, but for all of you to know because we haven't had a map for a while just to kind of orient ourselves where we are. And you can see the pathway from Antioch in Syria, right? We started this journey across the Mediterranean to Cyprus and then up into what is now modern-day Turkey, and made their way to Antioch, confusingly enough, of Pisidia. And then they're going to run all their way back. It's like they're almost going to make a circle. It looks like they're going to go on land back to Antioch in Syria, but instead they're going to go to Derbe and turn around and come back to this crazy city. It will reap benefits for them. But we're about at the end as far as the end and how far they traverse on this missionary journey, so I just want to get us reacquainted with the geography so we can think through where they're at.



20 miles, by the way, it sounds like no big deal because you get in your air-conditioned car and go, but that's about a five-hour walk. In 20 miles, you'd feel all 20 if we tried to do it today. But about a five-hour walk. So we know that they've left the last city if you glance through where we were in the beginning of Chapter 14. We're in the middle of this journey. They have shared the gospel. God has attested to that as Second Corinthians 12:12 says with, "The signs of true apostleship, which are signs and wonders," we don't see what they are in Iconium, but we see that they're doing them. So they share the message. The good news of the gospel, which is the creator is holy, you're not, we have a problem. We need it fixed and you need to be right with your creator by the time you die at least and it would be good for you to do that now, be reconciled to God. They share all that. God attests to that. A New Testament gospel without a written New Testament. So God authenticates it. He puts his imprimatur on it. He puts a certification on it.

And the attestation is this miraculous breaking of natural law. And we saw that up there in verse 3, if you see, and now we're going to get to the next city, right? A five-hour walk away. You go into this next city in Lystra and the same pattern is going to emerge. Now we have to look down on the passage to see that they were preaching the good news. Then we encounter immediately, as they're not going to be dissuaded from preaching the gospel from town to town, that they encounter a man who's crippled and that's where we pick this story up.

Take a look at verse 8 in Acts Chapter 14. Let me read it for you from the English Standard Version. It says, "Now at Lystra there was a man who was sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul speaking and Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, said in a loud voice, 'Stand upright on your feet.' And he sprang up and began walking." Now there's a lot there and again because we're not going into verse by verse, phrase by phrase in building the outline for us this morning, I just want to at least make note of what's going on here. We've got a very odd situation where we have a perception of some kind of faith, which I don't think is anything supernatural. Some commentators will think it would. But they're preaching the "Euaggelion" the good news, the message of salvation, forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God.

And if you look at your English Standard Version Bible, if you've got it there printed or electronically in front of you, look at the little letter next to it. There's a footnote in the margin, and it says it's the word for "made well," it comes from the word, we get the word "Soteriology" from, "Soter" or "Sozo" it's the word "to be saved," right? And often it's translated that way, saved or salvation. And when we think of saved or salvation, we think of the eternal matters and he's certainly talking about eternal matters to these people to be saved from the penalty of your sin when you meet your maker, when you cross the threshold of this life into the next.

Now they don't translate it that way because in the immediate context, it looks like he's about to be saved from, you know, being a paralytic. And he certainly is. Nevertheless, I think there's got to be a little double reference here to what's going on. Here's a guy who recognizes that what Paul is saying is true. He's got confidence that Paul is representing the



King of kings and Lord of lords, the one who is incarnate, the Daniel 7 "Son of Man," all authority belongs to him. And it's kind of like Jairus coming to Jesus saying, "I know you could heal my daughter. I know you have power." And he's always impressed Jesus with the fact that that's a virtue. You trust me. You've come to the right place. You know that I have that authority.

Now, of course, there are a lot of people who died in Jesus' day in the first century in Israel and a lot of people that were paralytic who never got healed. But in the demonstration of the signs of the power of Christ, the billboards, and that's a good word for miracle, the signs, they were pointing to the fact this is a supernatural fulfillment of all the promises of the Old Testament in this person, the Savior, who was going to come to remove our sins, that "Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world." That was a sign and a billboard. So he comes to Christ, he comes to the right place, and Jesus is good with that. You've come to the right place.

So he has faith to be saved. Now is he thinking about "saved" to be saved eternally or saved to be saved from this malady, this disability? Well, it's going to be both and certainly in this context he now says, OK, you know who the Christ is that I am preaching, stand up. And what it's going to serve as is what we saw in verse 3 earlier in our last passage, and that is that here is God attesting by signs and wonders. And people are going to be able to say, here's a guy preaching a message that we don't have written in a holy book because the Holy Book of the New Testament hadn't been written yet. But he's just relying on the truths of the promises of the Old Testament. And now there's a sign where everyone goes, "Well, he's telling the truth. Look what he did. He broke natural law." And the sign of a true representative of the one who can heal and raise the dead is being demonstrated here. And so the guy and look at the verb here, "He sprang up and he began walking."

So, I think, OK, we now are going to believe your message, just like in our last town in Iconium, they believed the message. And here's my point. Even the people who rejected the implications of the message and ran him out of town and picked up stones, and that's why he had to leave Iconium, here's my contention. They drove him out of town, not because they didn't understand his message, but because they did understand his message. And so here we got a whole different thing that's about to happen and erupt in the very next verse, verse 11. "When the crowds saw what Paul had done," they said, wow, he must be telling the truth about this Old Testament messiah. No. They said in Iconium, which I think is a little cue to let us know how this could be brewing in the background and Paul and Barnabas not cutting it off earlier. The local dialect, they were discussing these things and Paul and Barnabas apparently didn't know because it mushrooms into this big event.

So in Iconium, they're saying this to each other, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men." And again, if we were digging into every phrase, we get into all of the details of this. But you can look it up in your study Bibles and hopefully you got a good study Bible. If not go to our bookstore or a good commentary, you can read about the Roman fable, the legend of the gods Zeus and Hermes coming to Lystra and the one house that provided hospitality became the Temple of Zeus, which we're about to hear about, the priest of the



Temple of Zeus, in a minute. So the story was you'd better recognize the gods, the Greek gods when they come to our town. And so they say, "Wow, there's magic that we just saw. Here was a guy we've known from birth. He's never walked. He's now walking. These guys did it. These guys must be gods." And that's what they say. "They've come down among us just like we heard from our ancestors. They once came and if those who did not recognize them, they were in big trouble with the Greek pantheon."

And they said, well, it must be, you got a taller guy and a shorter guy. You got a guy, you know, I don't know, maybe Wade Moore, who knows what, but he must be Zeus, Barnabas is Zeus and Paul is Hermes. And again, you need some background here to know why there's any connection to him being the chief speaker and calling him Hermes. Hermes or the Roman equivalent of Mercury was the messenger of the information of the pantheon. So if Paul was doing all the preaching, even though he may have been shorter or smaller, it's like, OK, that must be Zeus, and this must be the messenger Hermes and they've come in among us. So they've identified them now and they're all talking about it. "Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. And the priest of Zeus."

So they went to go get the priest of Zeus or maybe he was part of this preaching, this open-air preaching, "whose temple was at the entrance of the city." Think about this now. "They brought oxen and garland to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowd." So now we got a big crowd coming and they got garland, they got all this stuff, this fru-fru stuff and flowers and greenery and garland and animals. And they're about to sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas.

Now, I hope I've adequately, even by reading it with a little bit of commentary, have convinced you that when you share the gospel at work this week, there's really no concern or expectation that anybody is going to go, "Oh, you must be a god. And quick, let me go get, you know, my dog, I don't know. We're going to sacrifice to you and venerate you." I mean, no chance of that. Number one, you're not an apostle with the signs of the apostles. You're probably not going to heal anyone or raise anybody from the dead this week. You won't do magic. And so no one's going to mistake you for anything in a Roman pantheon, so you have no opportunity to replicate this. And then you think, "Well, how's the preacher going to preach this?" Well, I'm going to preach this by saying this is a massive misunderstanding. And I guess all I would say is do you think anyone ever misunderstands what we're saying about Christ in the Bible today? Oh, it may not express itself this way. And all I'm telling you is by the time they show up with animals to sacrifice, this is the time you look at your buddy on the missionary trip and go, "Kooks! Let's get out of this town," right? "How are we going to fix this? They've totally misunderstood. We're done."

So verse 14, that's the temptation I would have "when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it," they said, "We're out of here." No. Instead, "they tore their garments and they rushed into the crowd, crying out, 'Men, why are you doing these things? We're also men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news,' right? That's the word "gospel," the "Euangelion," we bring you the good message of salvation. And one of the things is repentance that you leave behind these stupid things, "that you would turn from these vain



things to the living God," and Zeus isn't it, and the pantheon is not it and you just can stop with all this nonsense because the God we're representing here, God in Christ, is the God "who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that is in them."

"Now, in past generations," I know you've had your thing going here for a long time with the Zeus temple and all that and he's been very tolerant. "In past generations he's allowed all the nations to walk in their own way." He was working with Israel. He's providing this place where he's going to bring forth the Messiah. Then the message is going to go to the earth, and it's kind of like these people in the other nations weren't really the focus, and we weren't reaching people to the ends of the earth. Well, listen, he's put up with a lot of this. "And yet he hasn't left himself without witness." I don't care where you are in the globe, even your ancestors should have known and you guys should know. Even though you're going to hear for the first time the clarity of the Messiah coming and God being represented in Christ in the message of heaven being brought to earth.

Well, listen, God showed you by good things, right? "He did good things by giving you rains from heaven," the sky, "and fruitful seasons," and he satisfies your heart, "satisfying your hearts with food and with gladness." All those were expressions of God's goodness. And as it says in Roman Chapter 2 verse 4, "God is leading us to repentance in the goodness that he demonstrates to people." They ought to start seeking beyond all the frustration and the anger and all the things they see in the mirror and their own hearts. It's like, yeah, you need to know that things aren't right. There is a God, that God is good, that God is a God of order and beauty and symmetry and generosity, and I'm none of that stuff. So you should have been penitently seeking this God. And yet I know it hasn't been as clear as it's about to get here in the book of Acts for you guys.

So they preach, they try to clarify. "Even with these words," verse 18, "they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them." No animals were hurt in the filming of this section of the passage, right? No death of anything. They stop them. But even that, look at it, just like it's like barely. Barely. Two things here, right? Verses 8 through 13, 14 through 18. In 8 through 13, there's a big misunderstanding, one you'll never have this week, but you'll have misunderstandings. So I want us to spend a little bit of time, number one, knowing how the gospel, and I mean 21st century Southern California, is misunderstood. If you're taking notes jot that down. "Know How the Gospel Is Misunderstood," because it's misunderstood today. Not in this way, but it's misunderstood today.

So I'm stepping out now of the verses and phrases and syntax of this passage to say, OK, Christians of the 21st century, now we're going to think here in our culture and our time. People are not versed in Greek mythology and miscommunicate and misunderstand the ideas that you're presenting to them and in applying them to Greek mythology. But since communication is not what I say, it's what you hear, if there's not a perfect symmetry between what I say and what I'm intending and what you hear, then I know there can be miscommunication. If you're hearing something that I'm not saying, I'm not good at communicating. I'm going to say I can have a difficult time and a challenge communicating



because you've been conditioned to think in certain ways about the message I'm bringing to you.

Now, do you think people in our society when you share with your neighbor about God, the definitions of God have been shaped by their society and their culture and their background? Of course. And do you think they have any unbiblical concepts when you're trying to share this message with them? Of course they do. So I'm going to give you five, since I've got the microphone. Let me just give you my five and you can come up with 15 more, 105 more. But let me give you just pastorally to give you some counsel this morning. OK? There are ways in which people equate Christianity with the wrong thing. When they find you're peddling Christianity, because that's how they see it, right? "You want me to be a Christian. You want me to join your team." Yeah. Well, they can bring baggage into that, hearing things that you're not saying and I just want to make sure we know the propensity they have to hear things that you're not saying.

And they hear things many times because they know Bible passages. They might not know where this one's found, but they know this kind of stuff is in the Bible, like when the Jesus people come to town. Here's a guy who is crippled, and all of a sudden now he's walking. That sounds like a pretty good deal. So is that how this works? Five sub-points. Letter "A." Ready? Here's the first thing I think that we've got to make sure people don't misunderstand. Some people think Christianity equals less pain. I mean less physical pain. They think, "I mean like I can get a better body. If God will heal me if I've got some problem or my kid gets sick or maybe I've been diagnosed with cancer. I can be a Christian. Now God, the great physician, the guy who does healings in the Bible, he's going to be on my side. So maybe it means less pain for me.

And why not? I mean, even the passages you guys are studying at church on the weekend, there are people who are healed. And so is that what happens? I mean, I've heard people talk about becoming a Christian. God's got some wonderful plan for your life and a wonderful plan that God has for my life, it can't include like chronic inflammation in my joints or migraine headaches or any kind of, you know, psoriasis or maybe I've got some kind of cancer diagnosis. If I become a Christian, is that going to help with that?"

I just want to clarify. I don't want you to misunderstand what we're offering to you. We want you to be reconciled to God and being reconciled to God, though he is the great physician, doesn't mean you're going to be healed. I just got to be clear about that. You might. You might not. But I'll tell you what, and I'll just give you a reference in every one of these sub-points. Let me give you this one for this one. Second Corinthians Chapter 12. Second Corinthians Chapter 12. Most of you, Sunday school grads, you know this story. Paul confesses that he's got a really painful malady, an illness of some kind. He characterizes it this way as a "thorn in the flesh," a thorn in the flesh. So that means it's painful, physically painful. And it says in that passage that he pleaded with the Lord, that's a strong verb, pleaded with the Lord three times that it would be removed.



Now I'm thinking, OK, Paul you're reconciled to God, you're right with God, you're a messenger of God. You're tight with God. I guess none of that when it happens to you is something that God won't favorably respond to. And Sunday school grads, you know what happens, right? God says, "OK. I didn't know you were hurting there" and he took it away. No. Paul said, "I pleaded with the Lord three times that he might remove it and he said, 'No, my grace is sufficient for you.'" My grace is sufficient for you? Yeah, "My power is perfected in weakness." "In other words, no mistake that you have this ailment. I know the ailment is there. I know you called it and rightly so a "messenger of Satan to buffet you," to bring pain in your life. But I'm using that, Satan's messenger, I'm using that for you. You're now a prophet in the New Testament. You're giving revelation to the New Testament church. You could become conceited and puffed up. I want to make sure it doesn't happen. And one way I'm going to do that to kind of put a restraint on your ego is I'm going to give you physical pain. You're going to live with chronic pain for the rest of your life." Paul thinks, "Oh, thanks a lot." God says, "No, you need it, you need to have that. That's part of my plan for you."

So I'm thinking to be tight with God does not mean that you're going to have physical healings or less pain in your life. Should you pray when you get migraine headaches? I think you should. When you find out your kid has some bad diagnosis, should you pray? I think you should pray. I think you should ask God to be gracious, but at some point you ought to recognize it's not that God is deaf, it's that God may say, "Hey, here's the thing, I never promised you physical, you know, peace. I didn't promise that you wouldn't have pain. And if you want to talk about that, maybe you should talk to Job, right? Think about Job. I know all the other things that went on in his life, but remember that he had boils, think about this, all over his body and he was sitting there in an ash heap with a broken piece of pottery. This is the most godly man in his generation, scraping the pus off of his body. You want to talk about a guy who's in a massive pain and looks like this guy is a mess. Where's God in all this?

This is what you and I ask, because even us in our position as reconciled messengers of God, sometimes we don't even make the clear distinction. I'm not offering you a message that says if you follow Christ you won't die of cancer. I'm not saying that if you follow Christ that your illness, that you really, really struggle with, is going to go away. I'm not promising that. That's not what God said. It clearly is not what the Bible teaches. So I'm not offering you a Christianity that's some panacea, some elixir for your health.

Number two, Letter "B." How about this one? Some people think that Christianity, "If I get on board with what you're telling me, I'll have a tighter family, a stronger family, a more loving family. Matter of fact, you start talking to me about the Bible and Christ, and I went looking for Christian radio, I found what is called family radio. Oh, it's awesome. And they have programs like Family Talk and they got really important ministries called Focus on the Family. And then I looked at your website and you got all these, you know, things like a parenting class, you got marriage groups. And so I get it. I get it. I get it. Cool. I want to be a Christian. My family could use a little help. Maybe it'll be a little remedy for some of the problems I'm having, a lot of arguments with my wife, my kids are kind of out of control. I want to be a Christian because I want a better family, and it seems like you guys talk a lot about family. So I think, you know, I get it. I'd like part of that wonderful plan. I want to be a Christian."





OK, well, here's the deal. Communication is not what I say, it's what you hear, and if that's what you're hearing, that's not what I mean. I'll make you look at this one. I think this one's important. How about Matthew Chapter 10? We'll go straight to the words of Christ. Here's the promise of Christ. Matthew Chapter 10, drop down to verses 34 through 39. Note this carefully, because these aren't the verses that end up on kiosks at Christian bookstores. So we need to make sure we understand it because I don't want anyone to misunderstand what we are presenting to them in terms of Christianity as it relates to their family.

Verse 34, "Do not think..." this is Matthew Chapter 10 verse 34, is that what I said? "Do not think I've come to bring peace to the earth." Well, dude, every Christmas I get those Christmas cards, that's what it says. Isn't that what it says, right? "Peace on earth, goodwill to men." By the way, you should look that passage up again, right? "Peace on earth among those with whom he's pleased." I don't know. That's a bifurcated explanation and a description of one group versus another group, right? He does want to bring peace in this group. And guess what? That group is a minority group and a small group, and he does want to accomplish peace. Peace where? Well, peace vertically with God. That's the whole point of reconciliation. The Lamb of God is going to reconcile the world to himself. Sinners are going to be made right.

So just make sure that the Christmas cards you buy don't misquote the passage. And you can look up sermons on that, because I know some old translations that mislead us on that and you can hear my teaching specifically on that. And any good commentary will make that clear. But here it sounds like you must be talking about you're not going to end all geopolitical warfare. I'm talking about something very specific here. Here's the application, verse 35. "I've come to set a man against his father." Oh, you're messing with my family now. Yeah. "And a daughter against her mother." Oh wow. "And a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household." Now when they start thinking. "Cool, this is the family-friendly religion. This will be great." I just want to say, well, maybe we should open our Bibles and, yay, become a Christian and your family members will be your enemies. Maybe. I mean, that's possible.

Because guess what Christ does, he comes in and expects allegiance to him above every other human allegiance. As a matter of fact, keep reading, "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me," and I don't know what your parents were like, but you may be able to check that box. But most of you South Orange County people are going to have a hard time convincing your neighbors of the next part. "Whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." You're not getting this right if you don't understand that Christ is first and your loyalty to him may cost you peace in your family. So you could end your marriage over becoming a Christian. If you don't believe that, go to First Corinthians Chapter 7 sometime and read about how that happens. Your family could fall apart. Your kids could hate you because of this.

We don't lead with that, right? But I want to make sure my non-Christian friend understands Christianity does not promise you that you'll have less pain and good health, and Christianity



does not promise you that you will in your life have better families. You might, it would be great, if all your family repents and puts their trust in Christ. You could have a better family. You'll be persecuted together as a family unit. That'll be great. You can hang together, but at least you won't be torn apart. But if all of you don't have loyalty to Christ, it's going to be a problem. That sounds painful. So does a cross, verse 38, "Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me." You got to be willing to count the cost. "Whoever finds his life," because that's what I want, I just want a better family. I was hoping Christianity could be a means to me having better family relationships. "Whoever finds his life," if you find it, "you lose it. Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

And all of us put this on the altar and say every family relationship I have, every close tie of loyalty and devotion I have, I lay it on the altar and God can do whatever he wants with it. That's what Christianity looks like. The wonderful plan for my life, as people often posit this, is not about me having a better body and a better family because it may be a sickly body that God says, because I'm using you for my purposes, I need you to be sick and your family might turn against you. So we want to just clarify. Could it be the other way around? You might be healthy with a great family relationship and you're a devoted follower of Christ. Fantastic. Does that guarantee that everyone you share the gospel is going to have the same thing? No, it doesn't mean that at all.

I don't think I need much on this next point, but just pastorally, I just want to throw it out because some people still think this. OK? If I've ever seen a fish on a plumber's van or something. This is still out there. OK, ready? Letter "C." Some people think Christianity equals cultural respect, cultural respect. Now I know we're living in Sodom and Gomorrah right now, and it's getting worse. And you're in Southern California as I look in your eyes, barely surviving. But here's the deal, right? There is still a sense in which people think, "If I have a moral code and I'm committed to God and I believe in heaven and hell, it's going to keep me from doing bad things and maybe you'll trust me as your insurance salesman. Maybe you'll trust me as your plumber not overcharging. Maybe you'll trust me as your auto mechanic." Where in some parts of the country to be someone who's selling anything it would be good to know that you're a follower of God, at least a theist, I don't want an atheist surgeon, at least give me a theist surgeon. All I'm telling you is there's still a sense in which people think, "Well, I think I'll get some credibility as being a moral, upstanding citizen if I become a Christian." Now that's quickly deteriorating, I realize it.

I give you one verse for all these, how about this one? John Chapter 15 verses 18 to 19. John, Chapter 15 verses 18 and 19, "If the world hates you," Jesus said, "know that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but as it is I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." You ought to expect that. It doesn't mean you have to scrape the fish off your, you know, handyman truck. Right? That may speak to some people, but I'm just telling you there's no guarantee that you being a faithful follower of Christ is going to help the people look at you as a good person. Matter of fact, Paul put it this way in First Corinthians 4, he says, "We are considered the scum of the earth, and the refuse of the world." That's First Corinthians 14:13.



Letter "D," how about this one. And I know, you may say, you may roll your eyes, "Oh, we're way past that." I know that the prosperity gospel is an easy punching bag in circles like this, but I still think there are people out there who think Christianity, here's Letter "D," equals some kind of financial security, financial success even, in some people's mind. And here's all I'm saying. You may be the first intelligent, articulate Christian that somebody at your work has ever talked to about the Bible and Christ. They've seen all this craziness on Christian television, right? They know they've heard Joel Osteen do his thing or the prosperity guys do their thing and they think this, "Well, I think that's like crazy. They just want to get in your pockets. But this guy is a Christian. He's starting to make sense. I'm feeling some convictions." And they then say, "Well, he must mean that as well." And they start putting this together like, "Well, I guess I got to find a place for those guys because they're preaching Jesus too. And they start to think, "Well, maybe there are some financial securities that come with all this."

Paul had the same problem in Ephesus, which was a fairly well-to-do city, and he writes to Timothy, his pastor there, and he says in First Timothy Chapter 6, he says, I know you're dealing with people who assume that godliness is a means to gain, and the context is finances, financial gain. And he said this, here's his response, right? He said, you know, godliness, you know, it is a means of gain if we're talking about contentment. And contentment means you'll be content if you got food and covering, with that you'll be content. So Christianity is not promising you financial security, it's not promising financial success, but it is promising this: that if you're godly, you will learn contentment no matter whether you have a lot or a little. So I'm not promising you any kind of financial success, business success, any kind of societal respect. I'm not promising you good health, I'm not promising you a good family. I'm promising you forgiveness of sins in Christ. That's what I'm promising. And that's the message we bring. And I want to make sure you're not hearing something I'm not saying.

Fifth. Letter "E." This is a little more nuanced and I apologize for that, but maybe something you're not even quite convinced of yet, but I want to say that some people, and this is nuanced, but it's the fifth. Like I want us to at least consider it. Let me set the stage. You got a non-Christian I'm sharing the gospel with. He's a little tiny, you know, pawn in a gigantic cultural sea of anonymity. Right? Like, he's just out there doing his thing. He's just a cog in the wheel of society. Then he's got his family and his three or four friends at work and that's his little circle, his little affinity group, his little friend group, and his household. He hears you talking about Christianity. He's driven by churches with all these cars in the parking lot in a church like ours every single night, there are cars in the parking lot. Well, there's that thing going on. Those people over there do their thing, they have their little community.

Well, here's the thing, it's the difference between being lost in the sea of anonymity in culture or I got my little tiny circle. You're inviting me to follow Christ. If I become a follower of Christ, then I get to join your church thing and I become a part of that circle and now I have like a little... It's a bigger pond to swim in now. And I put it this way. Here are the words I use. Two words for all of these. It's not less pain, it's not stronger family, cultural respect, financial success. Here it is. I call it this: Christianity, some people think, is congregational admiration. Let me just put it that way. Let me unpack that.



Congregational admiration. There is a tendency to think, "Well, listen, I'm kind of a, you know, kind of a wannabe musician and, you know, of course, my family wants me to put the guitar away whenever I pull it out, they're sick of it. And of course, I'm never going to make it on, you know, on American Idol. And of course, I'm not good enough to get a contract in Nashville. But, you know, if I start, if I join your community, I'd fit. Those guys aren't pros. And maybe, you know, and it's not a guitar, I play the accordion. Maybe, hey, can I get on your stage and do a little...?"

"Or you know what? I took Toastmasters, you know, when I got out of college and I, you know, I kind of fancy myself as a speaker. And you know, these guys aren't, this is not Churchill up on the platform there, and they got other little classrooms all over. And, you know, maybe I can do some teaching here. Maybe I can finally, you know, show people that I'm not such a bad teacher myself, and so I can do it. Now I can do it. I have an audience here." Frankly, here's a way we put it. You can become a big fish in a small pond. And I do think some people think when we invite them to Christ, I'm inviting them to a body. And if I invite them to a body, well, then they think well, "I finally get to shine. I get a little adulation. I get some admiration."

Now you may not see that right on the surface, but I've been in ministry long enough to know it's very rampant in people's expectations. "I want to go in the church and I want to be someone there. Because in my family, you know, prophets get no honor in his hometown and in the world I'm a nothing. Right? I can't compete on the world stage. I'm not a celebrity. But I can kind of be a mini-celebrity there. I can kind of let myself shine there." And all I'm saying is that's not it.

Well, the whole chapter really is applicable. So let me give you First Corinthians Chapter 12. And you know the analogy, but let me drive it home, right? You in the body of Christ are positioned just as Christ assigned. And when you become a part of the body of Christ, God is going to put you in a place to serve and you're going to be in that position as a functioning part of the body where the manifestation of the Spirit. Some way he's going to endow you to be for the common good. Now you may want to be on the stage, on the platform or being someone who's recognized and applauded. There'll be adulation and admiration. Everybody will know your name. You'll walk there to get a donut and everyone will be stopping you about how great you're doing and what a wonderful thing it is. I'm so glad you're part of our church and you will be the big fish. And here's all I'm telling you. The passage says this: stop it with all that.

When the elbow wants to be the eye and the knee wants to be the nose, this is the problem here. This is the whole problem, one of the problems in Corinth, this kind of self-promotion. See, you ought to be content to be a nobody in your church, even though you're supposed to all serve, find your place, find your niche. But who knows where that will be? And the point is, every part has equal worth in God's mind in terms of the importance, even the lesser-seen things that never, ever get known. Right? They are playing a critical role. And you have to say, "Hey, come be a part of the body of Christ. Come be an active part of our church. Be a



follower of Christ. But you know, it may be that you'll never be applauded here. I mean, it may be that only at three or four people know your name. I mean, you can be going here for five years and they keep asking you, "Hey, are you new here?" You know like, "I hate this church, right? I mean, they should know me by now." I got to do something. I got to be someone. And all I'm telling you is I do think there's a little bit of that that we ought to be able to say, listen, we're not trying to get you into a mini subculture here where it's a chance for you to shine. That isn't the point of you becoming a follower of Christ.

I mean, you could be the CEO of a company, and you're not a Fortune 500 company, but you come here and think, "Well, at least here I'll be the dominant guy. I'll be the dude here." And you may end up serving, you know, the two-year-olds. And not that that's a bad thing, it's a good thing. It's just a hard thing. There are still diapers involved at that age. No? Not? I don't know. Stop grandpa, stop. All I'm telling you is that you need to recognize you're not promising people that stuff.

Christianity: less pain, stronger families, cultural respect, financial success, congregational admiration. We're not promising any of that. We're promising that you don't go to hell when you die. We're promising that you're right with the living God. We're promising that your sins are appended to the cross. You no longer bear the guilt of your sins. We're promising you all of that in Christ. Paul is presenting Christ, to be right with God, and they think we've got Zeus and Hermes in our midst. And all I'm telling you is that bait and switch, we got to make sure we're communicating clearly.

Now I've just thrown out pastorally as a pastoral counselor here this morning, five things and there are many more. And I've already given you some passages to at least counter some of that. But I want to take the last part of this passage and real quickly say, but you know, not only how do people misunderstand the gospel, but how do we best clarify the truth, not just by seeing a passage that counteracts that, but is there something in terms of the way in which I go about this that would help me clarify truth? So number two, "Consider How Best to Clarify the Truth." If you're taking notes, jot that down. And let me give you, I know, don't groan, five things real quick that will help you clarify the truth. And let's start with our passage again in verse 14.

What do they do when they hear that they completely misunderstood this in an egregious way? What do Paul and Barnabas do? What does it say? What do they do? It's in the Bible. It's not a trick question. They tear their clothes. I don't know, have you ever been on a trip where you got one bag? Let's say you're traveling on foot and you got a backpack. Do you really want to mess up a change of clothes? Tear up your clothes? You're on a speaking circuit, I don't want to take the jacket that I'm speaking in and tear it. That's, I mean, I know that's a silly thing to say, but I just want you to recognize, even though it's an ancient near east sign of despair and being distraught, they're aghast at what's happening and they tear their clothes to show that they are just like, appalled by this. I just want, I mean, isn't there another way? Can't you do it another way? Why would you need to do that? Now, you got to figure out if you can shop for clothes tomorrow. The point is they were willing to do something that shows the passion they have.



And what else do they do? I mean, instead of running away, which I think is what we would do, right? It says in this text they ran into the crowd. It's like they wanted to get their face and put it right in front of their face. And then what do they do? They raise the volume, crying out. All that in verse 14. Letter "A." Here's all I want to say. Be passionate about clarity. Be passionate about clarity. When people misunderstand our God and our Christ and our gospel, you need to say I am so passionate that you fix that in your mind. And that's the first thing we see. Jot down this passage. You go to Colossians 4:4. He says in verse 2, it says pray for us and then in verse 4, he ramps into this. He says, "That I can make this mystery of the gospel clear, which is how I ought to speak." He cares about clarity. I want you to clearly understand it.

I remember one of my complaint letters. This guy got on me hard about the fact that "I cannot stand your preaching anymore," he said. It's always fun to open on Monday morning. "I can't stand your preaching anymore," he said, "because you just repeat stuff and you repeat it and you say it differently, and you say it another way and you illustrate, it's like you can't stop." And then he ended the note, his handwritten note, he said, "WE GET IT ALREADY." I'm like, I mean, it made me feel bad at first, but I thought, I can't like apologize like fully for that. You may be, obviously as you fancy yourself, apparently, the brightest bulb in the box here at the church and you get it the first time I say it. But I mean, he felt like it was like biblical waterboarding, right? Like, "Stop, I can't take it. Stop. I get it." Right?

And I'm saying my goal is to make sure you get this like firmly ensconced in your brain. I think of Ecclesiastes 13, like the preacher's words are supposed to be like well-driven nails, which aren't like tap, tap, tap. It's like I'm supposed to drive this home. Why? Because as I try and teach it in my preaching class, I'm creating a lot of people who are going to get complaint letters. But what I'm trying to say is you ought to be so passionate about communication. You don't want anyone to leave that building without knowing exactly what you're saying. I mean, you got to be passionate about clarity. You want them to get it. You're going to say it, you're going to restate it, you're going to restate it differently, you use different words, you're going to illustrate it and apply it. You going to do all these things to make sure they get it. Right?

I don't want it to be seen like biblical waterboarding, but I want to rather maybe like biblical endless chips and salsa. Let's put it that way. You eat it, you taste it, it's good and it's like, OK. No, have some more. Put some salt on it, have some more. It's like, I want to make sure you don't leave this restaurant without knowing exactly how tortilla chips taste. I want to make sure you have your stomach full of them. I want to see everything in the main dish in a doggy bag, in a foil wrapper because you've had so many chips. And it's like, those are so good. Right? And the point is to fill this, to make sure every part is filled with this truth. And so I want you to be able to have someone at some point in your life say, "We get it already." OK? Because you're so passionate about communicating. And communication is not what I say it's what you hear. So I want to say it 15 different ways. And so you go, "I get it. I get it. I get it."

So I had to try and see complaint letters like that as a, you know, weird. So I know their psychosis, a weird compliment, like, "Thank you." So I framed it and put it on the wall. No, I



didn't. (audience laughs) I want you to be passionate about clarity, passionate about clarity. That's going to help whatever the correction you're going to make, I just want you to be passionate about clarity. Letter "B." Notice, if you look at our text here, all the references to Isaiah and Zechariah and the quote from Haggai. Do you see any of that? No. You don't see any references to any passages in the Old Testament, I'm assuming because these guys are Greeks, they have this Greco-Hellenistic culture. We're talking about the gods in Hellenistic names instead of Roman names. Well, they're not dealing with Scripture in a quotation, you know, laundry list like we see in other passages when they're dealing with people from the synagogues. Paul has understood the audience, and that's what I would have to say to you.

You got to, number two or Letter "B" analyze your audience. Who is it that's misunderstanding? How do I get in their head? How do I get in the sandals of these people and figure this out? Did Paul spend any time doing that? I think he did, and maybe he was a genius and he got it, you know, easily. But sometimes we have to get it by thinking hard about it. I don't want you just to exegete Scripture. I need you to exegete the people you're trying to speak that Scripture to. How do your coworkers see the world? I have to understand them. I have to know what they're thinking. We'll see this in Act 17 when Paul gets to Athens. He just speaks about natural theology and things in the world, and he starts to reflect the truths he tells in Romans Chapter 1. And all I'm saying is, you've got to know who you're speaking to. Analyze your audience.

In our day, I just want you to know it's different than grandpa's day. In grandpa's day I don't think they valued the way they do today, feelings over facts. And again, you in your small groups can go further with this. But like how in our generation are they hearing things differently than they used to? Or how in Southern California do they hear different things differently than in Kansas? And how in America do we view things differently and understand things differently than they do in some other country somewhere? You got to know your audience. And Paul would say in First Corinthians Chapter 1, to give you a passage on this, he said simple verse. He said, "the Jews demand a sign and the Greeks want wisdom." Now, that just seems almost like a throwaway line here. And he's talking about the wisdom of God and all that in the passage, but the point is he knows the difference.

Or how about when he's writing to Titus, one of the pastors that's pastoring there on Crete, on the island of Crete, and starts quoting Cretan poets and prophets. And he says, You know what? These things they say about Cretans are true and you ought to because this is true, you ought to "rebuke them sharply" in these ways. He talks about people, well, these kinds of people on this island are swayed by these "myths and these stories." Paul knows his audience and he wants Titus to know his audience. And you need to know your audience and you need to start thinking how does your coworker when you talk about Christianity, what are the things that are in the background that make him understand this wrongly? You've got to think in those terms. Analyze your audience. Right? Certainly in our day, it's all about, you know, I talk about means over research and appearance over character and autonomy over submission, all the things that we've got to work through to help our people in our generation, our kindred here understand the gospel.

Now this one's dangerous, but I want you to turn to this one First Corinthians Chapter 9, First Corinthians Chapter 9. First Corinthians Chapter 9, a classic text, it's so important that we understand. When I think about my audience and understand the people I'm trying to share the gospel with, I need to adapt some of my methods. Right? I need to adapt my methods. I need to try to be as relevant as I can. And relevance is a dangerous way to put this. Maybe adapt my methods is better. So Letter "C," adapt my methods. I want to adapt my methods by recognizing people are going to have different expectations and so what I do or how I put this, does the gospel ever change? It never changes. I know this is a dangerous passage, but I want you to deal with it in your small groups. And one of the things I'm going to do in your small groups, as you see on the questions, I'm going to make you deal with the parenthetical phrases here because those are the boundaries.

So let's look at it, verse 20, First Corinthians 9:20, "To the Jews I became as a Jew." Now wait a minute, you are a Jew. No, no, I understand that. But I'm no longer a Jew the way I was in the sense that I am subject to the ceremonial laws of God. Right? But I'm trying to win the Jews by becoming AS a Jew. Am I a Jew? No, I'm not converting back to Judaism to win the Jews. No, but "I'm becoming like a Jew" insofar as I can. Like, "They're under the law," look at the middle of verse 20, "and I became as one under the law," though, here's the parenthetical boundary, "(though, not being myself under the law)."

OK, Paul is going to go to Derbe. He's going to turn around and come back to Lystra. When he comes back to Lystra for the second time, he picks up Timothy. When he picks up Timothy, Timothy has a Greek father and Timothy's not circumcised. And not being circumcised, here's Timothy who becomes a protege, a disciple of the Apostle Paul, and Paul takes him on this tour with him. And of course, they're going to go into the synagogues and he's going to preach from the Old Testament Scriptures, and he's got Timothy here next to him. And so he has him circumcised. I don't think about this too hard or too long. But he has him circumcised because they're going to go into the synagogues, which again, don't think about this too long, are they checking on the way in or how does this work? That's a different sermon, but...

He says I don't want them to stumble over the fact that this guy is not circumcised. And yet Paul is going to right back to the Galatian churches in the same area and say, if you let yourself be circumcised, Christ is of no value to you. "You've fallen from grace." That's what he writes to the Galatians churches. Huh? See, this is why this is the most dangerous sub-point in the sermon. Because I am saying you got coworkers and neighbors and extended family members that need Christ, maybe immediate family members, and you're going to have to somehow analyze where they're at and then try to adapt your methods so that you can speak clearly because communication is what they hear, not what you say. So I have to be as clear as I can. Therefore, I'm going to have to adapt kind of how I approach this thing. I'm not going to change the truth of the gospel, but adapt.

Now Paul was able to have Timothy circumcised and Paul circumcising Timothy is not like the Galatians getting circumcised so that they can be saved, they can be right with God. So it's dangerous. They're playing on the edge, it seems, of saying I want to be culturally relevant





here so that they'll hear me. I don't want to put a stumbling block in front of them, like First Corinthians 10 says, "All things are lawful," that are lawful, right? Because there's the parenthetical boundary here, "but not all things are helpful." So I'm going to do things that are helpful insofar as I can before I cross the border so I can be heard here. If you trust in circumcision, you're going to go to hell. Christ says it is of no value. You trust in Christ alone. But Timothy, we can get this thing out of the way.

Look at the next line. He says, "Outside," verse 21, "to those outside of the law, I became as one outside the law. Oh, a parenthetical border, boundary here. (Not being outside the law of God, but under the Law of Christ.) Of course, I'm going to keep the moral law of God. If they say, "Hey, we'll listen to you. Why don't you kill a few people this afternoon and we're going to go on a crime spree?" "No, I can't go there. I'm still under the law of God and under the law of Christ. I have a moral code. No, can't." But if you want to hand me a ham and cheese sandwich, right? I wouldn't do that if I were in the synagogue. But whatever, it's fine, I can be as one not under the law because I'm not under the law. All of this why? "That I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I may win the weak. I've become all things to all people, that I by all means save some." That's huge. What are the means that you need to employ or adapt or change or customize or tailor so that you can be heard without crossing the lines of morality of any kind of trust in anything else, of any adaptation of the gospel in some way that's not truthful?

Letter "D." I already quoted Colossians 4:4. But let me quote the context. Listen to it. Colossians Chapter 4 verses 3 through 6, he says. "Pray at this time for us that God would open a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ on account which I'm in chains or in prison, that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak." Then he says, You guys "walk in wisdom toward outsiders making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person." So you got to think about the people you're sharing with, those outsiders, they need to hear you. And he starts with, "Pray for us that we can do that." And then he says, you need wisdom so that you can do that.

See, I want clarity, clarity to every outsider about what the gospel is, who Christ really is. Two things that are on each side of the sandwich of this thing, to have clarity, are praying and wisdom, which immediately should lead our minds, Sunday school grads, to James Chapter 1 verse 5. "If anyone lacks wisdom let him pray." And it's wisdom not to pick the ponies at the racetrack. I want wisdom from God so I can know how to do God's stuff. And God wants your neighbors saved. God wants to have you be an ambassador of the gospel to people in our generation. You need to be praying for wisdom. That's Letter "B." Just pray for wisdom. How can I reach these people?

You may have on your prayer list some non-Christians in your extended family or your coworkers. "I really hope Jim comes to Christ." I need you to start praying for wisdom as to how YOU can be the ambassador to reach him. How can I know that audience and adapt my methods and then have an entree to clearly communicate the gospel? By the way, that's another passage you can memorize. It's a good one for this week. Colossians Chapter 4



verses 2 through 6. This is all about clarity. It's about prayer. It's about wisdom. It's about knowing how to approach people who are not Christians. So good.

Last one. Second Corinthians Chapter 4, let me turn you there. Second Corinthians Chapter 4. We'll end with this. Second Corinthians Chapter 4. This is the fifth one, Letter "E." It says, "Having this ministry," Second Corinthians 4:1, "by the mercy of God," he's an ambassador, he says, "we do not lose heart." And you're going to see in the context, it's because people are rejecting them because they're not getting through. They're tempted to say "whatever," but they're saying we're not going to say whatever. So that's my fifth one, Letter "E." Don't lose heart. Don't lose heart. Don't lose heart. And I know that you want to because you think they're kooks. They don't get it. No matter what I say, they think something else.

Here's the encouragement, verse 2, "We've renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways." We're not going to in any way try and do something unbiblical or wrong. No, "We're not going to practice any kind of cunning, we're not going to tamper with the word of God, but by an open statement of the truth, we're going to commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God." We're going to do the right thing. We're not going to mess with the gospel. We're going to tell the truth. We going to represent Christ clearly.

Now we're doing all we can to adapt our methods as we know Paul believes in. He's doing it here in the sermon in Lystra. He says, "Even if our gospel is veiled, it's veiled to those who are perishing. In the case of people like that, the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ," which is mind-boggling, they can't see it, "who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves," right, as they are coming to sacrifice for Hermes and Zeus. It's not us, guys. No, we're not claiming ourselves as anything. No, we're claiming that we are servants. "We're claiming Christ Jesus as Lord, with ourselves as your servants," for Christ's sake, "for Jesus' sake."

Now all that doesn't sound very encouraging, but let's end with this one, verse 6, "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness.' God said, Let there be light and BAM it happened. He said, "has shown in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God." And guess what? "We saw it in the face of Christ." We looked at Christ and saw the value. We looked at Christ and saw... Why? Because God, turn the light bulb on. And all I'm telling you, you may be crazy that there are people who are bowing down to sacrifice animals to Paul and Barnabas. Maybe standing in the crowd is Timothy, who's later going to be entrusted with the pastoral leadership of the church at Ephesus that Paul had been in for three and a half years later in his missionary journey. And he's going to say, "Hey, Timothy, you're the guy." Right there, maybe in the crowd. We learned nothing about him on this visit, but on his next visit, Timothy shows up as a believer in Christ.

Don't lose heart. Had they shrugged and said "whatever" at this point, humanly speaking, Timothy wouldn't be the pastor of Ephesus. We wouldn't have the pastoral epistles of First and Second Timothy. Don't lose heart. You want to be as tenacious and as unyielding, indomitable in your commitment to clear things up. A lot of things that are unclear in



conversations and marriage, have you ever noticed that? Let's just pretend, it doesn't happen often, but Carlyn, let's just say, had a big bowl of ice cream and she calls out to me and says, "Do you want chocolate sirup on that?" That's a thought right there, isn't it? And I said, "No, no, hon, don't worry about it." And she thinks I said, "Yeah, pour it on hon." So she pours and slathers my vanilla ice cream Dryers with like Hershey's chocolate. So it's just a volcano of like chocolate. And she brings it to me, and I'm worried about calories, right? And I said no. That's when she brings it to me and I see it and there's when I say, "Wow, whatever, whatever." (audience laughs) I didn't want it, but you would have it, right? I quit trying to communicate here about what you put on my ice cream. Just, I'll eat it. Don't worry about it.

All kinds of misunderstandings go on in conversations, and a lot of them don't matter. Right? It's something way more important than a calorie count is when you're talking to a non-Christian about Christ and Christianity and reconciliation to God and they don't get it. Do all that you can to prayerfully, wisely, insightfully make it clear. That's your job, that's my job. We need to be passionate about that.

Let's pray. God, a lot of misunderstanding here in the city. We just want to see people saved. We want to be tools and agents to see that happen. We want to see people get it right. We know it's not just a human endeavor, as we just read in Second Corinthians 4, we know that your Spirit is turning the light bulb on and we just want to be a part of seeing that from the front row in conversations. It's going to take some tenacity, some endurance, the wherewithal to not give up on trying to clarify when there's misunderstanding. So help us to realize that messengers of the gospel, just in our vocabulary, there should never be a "whatever." Never. Help us to keep talking till we can't. If they're going to reject the gospel and we're going to kick the dust off our shoes and move on, I just want at least make sure that you understood what you're rejecting. I want to make it clear. So help us in that regard as we represent you this week.

In Jesus name. Amen.